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ABSTRACT

John Reiff's conceptual framework regarding conflicting views of peace provides insight into interpersonal communication which can be successfully applied to conflicts in writing conferences and has already been used at the Colorado College Writing Center. First, a tutor or writer using the "Peace through Strength" frame of reference might see interaction as a competition over authority, in which the goal is to finish the paper his or her way by forcing the other side to relent. In "Peace through Negotiation" the writer or tutor states the problem in terms of misunderstanding in which one side fails to see that both sides have the common interest of finishing the paper. The goal is to finish the paper by means of negotiation. "Peace through Social Change" assumes that the educational system is unfair and that it sets up people to lose. The solution is to make the parts of the system responsible to each other and more helpful. The final frame of reference for understanding conflicts in a writing conference is "Peace through Personal/Spiritual Change." Here the root of the problem is that the self-absorbed person is not taking responsibility for explaining himself or herself. The goal is to train the self-absorbed person in how to respect the other person and how to create mutual respect. (Two figures containing charts for conflicts in peace and writing application are included. Dialogues illustrating conflicts in writing conferences are also included.) (KEH)

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Using Peace Studies to Understand Writing Conferences

by Molly Wingate, Writing Center Director, Colorado College

Writing teachers and tutors use conferences to give feedback that will empower writers to keep writing. Teachers hope to create a peaceful, nurturing environment which will encourage writers to experiment with words and ideas. When a writing conference goes awry, often the cause is a conflict between the teacher/tutor and the writer, a conflict about how the conference should proceed. Using an idea borrowed from peace studies, this paper will describe some of these conflicts and suggest how to resolve them.

In his paper "Frames of Reference for Peace Studies," John Reiff describes a conceptual framework, four frames of reference, that provides a way to understand conflicting views of peace. Each frame of reference differs in how it defines the problem, in the assumptions it makes about the source of the problem, in how it envisions a solution, in how it would reach a solution, and in who it thinks should be solving the problem. The Reiff's four frames of reference are listed across the top of the following charts, and the categories which describe a conflict are listed down the sides of the charts (figure 1).

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The first frame of reference is Peace through Strength. In this frame of reference, the problem is that enemies threaten us; those with this view assume that the root of the conflict is that life is a competition -- us vs. them. The goal or solution to the conflict is victory, a goal reached through force or threat

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of force, and the people who work out the solution are the governing elites.

The second frame of reference is Peace through Negotiation. Here the problem is that a bad judgement or a misperception has led to mutual threat. In this view, the root of the problem is that both sides do not see their common interests. Stability is the goal or solution to the conflict, a goal which can be reached if the governing elites negotiate.

Peace through Social Change, the third frame of reference, defines the problem as direct violence caused by social structures. The root of the problem is that we have an unjust social order and exploitative power structure. The goal in this frame is a new world order as a result of radical social change. This change will come through grassroots organizing.

The final of Reiff's frames of reference is Peace through Personal/Spiritual Transformation. Here the problem is that our own self-absorption and violence is reflected in the social order. This view assumes that our ego, lack of moral imagination and lack of responsibility are the sources of the problem. The solution to the problem is to create a society based on love and non-violence, a solution that comes about as a result of individual transformation and action. Individual action will create grassroots organizing which will in turn involve the governing elites.

On the chart labelled "Frames of Reference for Understanding Conflicts in Writing Conferences" (figure 2), I translated

Reiff's work into a language useful when understanding conflicts in writing conferences. Conflicts in writing conferences come about when someone uses power to get someone else to do something. For example, a writer can try to get a tutor to do the work and write the paper, or a tutor can try to get a writer to rewrite the paper the way the tutor wants it. When a conflict arises, the conference stalls, and the writer is rarely empowered to experiment with writing.

In my translation of Reiff's paper, a tutor or writer using the Peace through Strength frame of reference sees the problem as 'You are threatening me as an authority.' The root of the problem is a competition over authority; the solution is that one side wins when the paper is finished in his or her way; the method of achieving that goal is forcing the other side to relent, and the people who will settle the conflict will the writer and the tutor.

In Peace through Negotiation, the writer or tutor states the problem in terms of misunderstanding, "You are misunderstanding me." The root of the problem is that one side fails to see that both sides have a the common interest, finishing the paper. The goal, then, is to finish the paper by means of negotiation. Again, the writer and tutor will work together to solve the conflict.

Peace through Social Change, when translated for use with writing conferences, defines the problem in terms of the educational system. It does violence to students through its

hierarchical, misogynist system. This view assumes that the educational system is unfair and that it sets up people to lose. The goal or the solution to this problem is to make the parts of the system responsible to each other and more helpful. To achieve this goal, the institution must be completely overhauled, and in a writing center conference, the people to do the overhauling are the writer and the tutor.

The final frame of reference for understanding conflicts in a writing conference is Peace through Personal/Spiritual Change. At first, this frame of reference appealed to me because it represents my purposes and goals in tutoring writing. Here, the problem is, "You are self-absorbed. I don't exist as an audience for you." The root of the problem is that the self-absorbed person is not taking responsibility for explaining himself or herself. The goal, then, is to have this person start explaining. To reach this goal, the self-absorbed person will be transformed and will respect the other, as the other already respects him or her. The writer and the tutor will work together to settle this conflict.

To understand how these frames of reference help explain conflicts in writing conferences, I will apply them to dialogues from the Colorado College Writing Center. This Writing Center specializes in hour-long, drop-in appointments and is staffed by one director and 15 undergraduate tutors.

Situation One:

Tutor: Hi, I'm Katherine. How're you doing today?

Writer: I'm Mary. I'm okay.

T: What are we working on today?

W: I have to write a paper saying why this book was good. And I haven't started writing yet. I just wanted to ask you if you thought my ideas sounded okay.

T: Okay, what have you been thinking about?

W: Well, it was a novel, and I really liked what the author said about parents and kids. There's this great quote, something like, "When the children are born, the parents start dying." And I really think that's true. I mean, you can see it in all the characters' lives and how they all fall apart when they have kids.

T: Okay. That sounds interesting, and that tells me one of the reasons why you liked the book, but I don't think that tells me why the book was a good piece of writing. What are some of the qualities of good writing that you saw in this book?

W: Oh, I don't know much about what's "good writing." Couldn't I just write about this one idea she had, about parents and kids, and the kids killing off their parents? It wasn't violent or physical or anything. Just like, Rhoda's parents . . . they spent so much time arguing over how to raise her that they forgot how to love each other and . . .

T: Again, that sounds interesting, but I don't think it's what your professor is really looking for. I think you should try to get off of those ideas and focus more on what it is about the book that makes it good.

W: But I don't know how to do that.

In terms of Reiff's analysis, the tutor operates from a position of Peace through Strength -- she considers the conflict to be over her authority. The writer threatens her as an authority by challenging her interpretation of the assignment. In the tutor's mind, the writer should respect her authority,

power, and vast experience working on papers just like this and simply change the paper topic. The tutor assumes that the root of the problem is a competition in which the best idea will win. The writer clings to her ideas, so the tutor, thinking she is working for the best interests of the writer, asserts her authority and tries to force her ideas on the writer. The tutor's vision of the goal or solution is the ultimate victory of her ideas, and the writer's acceptance of the tutor's wisdom.

The writer, however, wants to work with the tutor. The writer sees the conflict as one of miscommunication and is operating from a Peace through Negotiation stance. She thinks that they share a common goal -- finishing her paper -- but the tutor has misunderstood her points, so now their common goal is blurred. The writer tries to negotiate when she tells the tutor that while she is not well versed in critiquing "good writing," she does feel comfortable talking about one concept in the story. In the end, the writer is not helped, but she sure is confused and frustrated. The tutor is not constructively collaborating with the writer, rather she is working against the writer.

I only wish conflicts on this order were more rare. I have often felt that I really know what a professor is asking for, and I go forth to explain it, albeit forcefully, for the writer's benefit. My need for the paper to be on the mark and look the way I think it should overrides the more important and empowering goal of having the paper look like what the writer wanted. Now here is the same situation with a different ending.

Same Scene, new ending

Tutor: Hi, I'm Katherine. How're you doing today?

Writer: I'm Mary. I'm okay.

T: What are we working on today?

W: I have to write a paper saying why this book was good. And I haven't started writing yet. I just wanted to ask you if you thought my ideas sounded okay.

T: Okay, what have you been thinking about?

W: Well, it was a novel, and I really liked what the author said about parents and kids. There's this great quote, something like, "When the children are born, the parents start dying." And I really think that's true. I mean, you can see it in all the characters' lives and how they all fall apart when they have kids.

T: Okay. That sounds interesting, and that tells me one of the reasons why you liked the book, but I don't think that tells me why the book was a good piece of writing. What are some of the qualities of good writing that you saw in this book?

W: Oh, I don't know much about what's "good writing." Couldn't I just write about this one idea she had, about parents and kids, and the kids killing off their parents? It wasn't violent or physical or anything. Just like, Rhoda's parents . . . they spent so much time arguing over how to raise her that they forgot how to love each other and . . .

T: That sounds like an idea you feel strongly about, and it's definitely something that struck you about the book, so let's work with that idea. We generally call the main ideas or messages in a book themes, right? So do you think that this idea about parents and their children could be a theme of the book?

W: Yeah, I guess it could. Especially because, like I said, you can see it happening to all the characters.

T: Great! So does carrying out a theme through the main characters have any effect on the quality of the book?

W: Yeah, I could say it was a good book, because the author made the characters reflect the theme, so we could see that it wasn't just an empty statement, but that it could apply to anybody.

T: Good . . . why don't you try expanding on that idea?

In this case, the tutor changed her frame of reference. She took on a Peace through Negotiation stance, too. She recognizes the common goal -- finishing the paper-- and starts to find ways to combine her point of view with the writer's. She keeps her idea in mind -- she still wants a paper about good writing -- but she is trying to negotiate in the writer's terms. The writer has a chance to write a paper using her own ideas.

Here is another scene from the same Writing Center.

Scene 2

T: Hi, can I help you?

W: I'm looking for someone who has taken philosophy and knows a lot about Plato.

T: Well, I'm not a philosophy major or anything, but . . .

W: Well, then, I don't think it'd do much good to go over my paper, because it's kind of complicated, and I don't want to have to be explaining myself every other sentence. You know, I just don't know how I'm supposed to write a good paper for this class. They never taught me how to write in high school, but here they expect me to already know how to write. And even if I did know how to write, I get really confused with all this philosophy stuff, and I'm in the class, so I don't see how you could help me.

T: You know, sometimes it's helpful to have someone who doesn't know much about your topic look at your paper, because if they can understand it, you know you have written a clear paper. And they can let you know when they get lost and can ask you questions to fill in those gaps. Besides, I'd be interested in learning more about Plato from your paper.

W: Well, maybe. But I still think it'd be a lot easier, and I wouldn't have to worry about explaining myself and filling in the gaps all the time, if everybody would just get organized and decide what they want everyone to do and when. Then maybe I'd write better, instead of feeling set up.

T: You're probably right. But since we can't exactly overhaul the educational system this afternoon, maybe we can at least tackle this particular paper and see if we can succeed at that level.

In this dialogue, the tutor starts out using a Peace through Personal Transformation frame of reference. The tutor assumes that the root of the problem is the writer's inability to see the tutor as an audience. The tutor tries to become an audience when she says, "I would like to learn." However, the writer does not respond to the patient waiting and prodding of the tutor, so the tutor switches to a Peace though Negotiation stance. She signals the end of the conflict by saying, "You're right." She assumes that the root of the problem is that the writer misunderstands what a tutor can do; she establishes getting the paper done as a common goal, and suggests that they work together at this level.

The writer is in a Peace through Social Change frame of mind. The problem is the entire system -- her high school and now college. She feels set up, and she is angry. She wants to change the system so it is organized and responsible, and she would like to have it done already. The writer does not think that she and the tutor have much to do with changing the situation.

The tutor acknowledges the writer's point of view and makes it possible for them to work together. In such cases, I think it is the tutor's responsibility to see the conflict and respond in an accommodating way. Here the tutor shifted her frame of reference, thus creating an atmosphere that will allow -- we hope-- the writer to write in peace.

I worked on this idea with Katherine Shelley, an undergraduate tutor at Colorado College. When we presented the

idea of using an analysis from peace studies, the other tutors said, "That sounds good, but are we supposed to do with it? Are we supposed to explain to writers that they are in a peace through strength mode or are we to hold this secret knowledge and sit in judgement." A tough audience.

We responded by pointing out that the tutor doesn't sit in judgement because he or she is contributing to the situation, too. The frames of reference provide the opportunity for the tutor to realize how he or she is contributing to the conflict and to respond in a way that empowers the writer, given the circumstances. In some cases, explaining the frames of reference might help to empower the writer, in some cases it might not.

The tutors then asked, "Are you trying to get the tutor and the writer to share the same perspective?" Not necessarily. If gaining the same perspective on the conflict is appropriate and helpful in establishing a peaceful working relationship, then the writer and the tutor may end up operating from the same perspective. However, as the examples in this paper indicate, the parties don't have to see the conflict the same way for the writer to get good work done.

The Colorado College tutors were concerned about the flux of a conference. "What if you are incorrect in your quick analysis, and you put yourself or the writer in the wrong frame?" Tutoring writing is always a matter of using your best judgement, and sometimes a tutor's judgement is wrong. Analyzing a conflict and acting on that analysis is worth the risk of being wrong. We

have a better chance of empowering writers when we take a deep breath to see what is causing a conflict than when we don't.

As the tutors at Colorado College have continued to work with this peace studies analysis in their minds, a few have remarked on the value of changing perspectives. They say they are better able to respond to the changing atmosphere in a writing conference. For my part, understanding the frames of reference has allowed me to discover why my Peace through Personal Transformation stance does not always work, especially when I rigidly adhere to it. Personal transformation is the goal of my tutoring, but I may not be able to start there. I have learned to be flexible, to change my frame of reference, so that I can work toward creating a peaceful, nurturing space for writers to write.. . and maybe then they will get interested in personal growth.

In this paper, I have talked about conflicts that cause writing conferences to stall, to become ineffective. These conflicts have been over how a conference should proceed, not over deeply held beliefs. Conflicts over content can be quite tough, such as disagreements over supporting apartheid, using gender-exclusive language or using grossly offensive subject matter. I think these content-related conflicts can be understood using the frames of reference, too. The teacher or tutor can figure out who is using which frame of reference and then try to work toward an empowering resolution. If a teacher or tutor wants to empower the writer to experiment, then taking

the opportunity to understand the conflict before responding will help to create a way to talk about the conflict. Even if the teacher would rather confront a student on gay bashing than work for a resolution, the frames of reference from Peace Studies can help explain the conflict between two people.

This work using a method from Peace Studies continues the search in Composition Studies for models to analyze writing conferences. Recently, others in composition have made similar efforts to use seemingly unallied fields to talk about writing conferences. Louise Z. Smith uses family systems to talk about unproductive conferences. Susan Monroe Nugent uses Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule's theory of women's cognitive development from Women's Ways of Knowing in a longitudinal study of one woman writer. Other fields that might give us methods and models to investigate questions about writing conferences include psycho-therapy research into sessions, small group sociology studies, and educational research into feedback. While borrowing a method from another seemingly foreign field like Peace Studies may appear clumsy, I encourage you to see what you think of it when applied in your own setting.

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Frames of Reference for Understanding Peace

written by John Reiff, Program in Global Peace and Security
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figure 1

	Peace through Strength (Machiavelli, Nixon)	Peace through Negotiation (Robert McNamara)	Peace through Social (structural) Change (Johan Galtung, Betty Reardon)	Peace through Personal/ Spiritual Transformation (M. Gandhi, Gustavo Gutierrez)
Definition of the Problem	Enemies threaten us	Bad Judgement Misperception has led nations to mutual threat	Direct and Structural Violence Social Structures cause or commit violence	Self Absorption and Personal Violence reflected in social order
Assumptions about the root of the problem	Life is competition us vs. them	Arms race and threat of war come from failure to see common interests	Unjust social order exploitative power structure	Ego/Sin/Lack of moral imagination/ Lack of responsibility
Vision of the Goal or Solution Peace is . . .	Victory	Stability in the status quo: absence of war	A new world order absence of war plus -political participation -economic equity -ecological balance -social justice	Society based on principles of love and non-violence
Means of Reaching the Goal	Force or threat of force	Rational Negotiations around mutual interests: arms control	Radical Social change: evolutionary or revolutionary	Individual transformation and action
Agent: Who does it?	The governing elites	The governing elites	The grassroots	The grassroots joined by the governing elites

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Frames of Reference for Understanding ~~Peace~~ Conflicts in Writing Conferences

Written by John Reiff, Program in Global Peace and Security
University of California, Santa Barbara

figure 2

	Peace through Strength (Machiavelli, Nixon)	Peace through Negotiation (Robert McNamara)	Peace through Social (structural) Change (Johan Galtung, Betty Reardon)	Peace through Personal/ Spiritual Transformation (M. Gandhi, Gustavo Gutierrez)
Definition of the Problem	You are threatening me as authority.	You are misunderstanding me.	The education system does violence to students through its hierarchical, misogynist system.	You are self-absorbed; I don't exist as an audience for you.
Assumptions about the root of the problem	Authority has become a competition.	We are failing to see our common interest -- finishing the paper.	The education system is not fair. It sets people up to lose.	You don't take responsibility for explaining yourself.
Vision of the Goal or Solution Peace is . . .	I win; you do the paper my way.	Finishing the paper/creating a product	Change the system to make the parts responsible to each other and more helpful.	You'll explain yourself to me.
Means of Reaching the Goal	You will just do it.	Let's negotiate on how to get the paper done.	Overhaul the institution immediately and completely.	You will come to respect me as I respect you.
Agent: Who does it?	You will acknowledge my authority.	You and I	You and I	You and I

I tried to write this version of the chart so that "you" or "I" could be the writer or the tutor.